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Last Hutterite migrant to be 100 years old

FREEMAN, S.D. — Mrs. Wip Kleinsasser, the sole survivor of the wave of Russian Hutterite migrants to the United States in the 19th century, will be 100 years old on Tuesday.

Mrs. Kleinsasser was born in a year old when she was brought by her parents, Rev. and Mrs. Jakob L. Wip, with the first group of migrants in 1874. Her family is a family historian's dream.

The Hutterites, named after their leader, Jakob Hutter, in 1835, have a history of migration in search of religious freedom. This compelled them to move from Austria to Transylvania to Russia between the 16th and 19th centuries. Between 1874 and 1879, thousands of Hutterites, Mrs. Kleinsasser among them, migrated to the United States.

About 100 Hutterites lived in colonies in South Dakota and Minnesota. Hutterite colonies are communities of landowning farmers who live communally. They share the same land, tools, and other resources.

These settlements were known as the "Paradise." Mrs. Kleinsasser is the last living member of either of these groups.

Her family notes that Mrs. Kleinsasser represents the end of the era of settlers who 100 years ago left Russia for the sake of religious convictions. One of the first Hutterite colonies in the United States was founded in 1874.

Mrs. Kleinsasser was married to John Kleinsasser. He served in the U.S. Army during World War I and died in 1918.

Of her 10 children, only two are still living. Mrs. Kleinsasser is a graduate of the Hutterite school and has been a member of the Hutterite church for many years.

Her family will celebrate her birthday with her family and a family dinner followed by an open house.